

*Department
of
Human Services*

Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, February 10, 2006

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*Prepared by the
DHS Office of
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*Important story at
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141 programs on Bush's cut list

White House estimates it'll save \$15 billion if proposals to kill or trim federal grants are approved by lawmakers.

*Andrew Taylor / Associated Press
February 10, 2006*

WASHINGTON -- Grants for safe and drug-free schools, vocational education and reading programs for jailed young people are among 141 federal programs President Bush wants to eliminate or cut significantly.

Bush has proposed axing most of them before, only to see Congress save them. The Office of Management and Budget released the new list Thursday.

Many of the programs proposed for elimination have an emotional pull, like one providing \$107 million for food for the elderly poor.

Others are pretty arcane, like one giving the Postal Service \$29 million to pay it back for the generous subsidies it once provided to nonprofit mailers.

And how many Americans know there is a \$9 million "Exchanges With Historic Whaling and Trading Partners" program, which gives money to museums, aquariums and heritage centers in Alaska, Hawaii and Massachusetts?

Killing or cutting these and scores more would save taxpayers almost \$15 billion, the White House estimates.

In issuing the list, Bush wants to build upon the success he had last year in killing or cutting 89 programs saving \$6.5 billion. He's also hoping to rein in lawmakers' abuse of "earmarks," projects wanted by individual lawmakers.

But most of this year's proposed cuts were rejected by lawmakers last year and likely will be again. Of 91 programs slated to be killed, to save \$7.3 billion, only about one in six are new proposals.

The programs slated for elimination are congressional favorites funded through annual appropriations bills. They include \$3.5 billion from the Department of Education, including grants for safe and drug-free schools and vocational education grants.

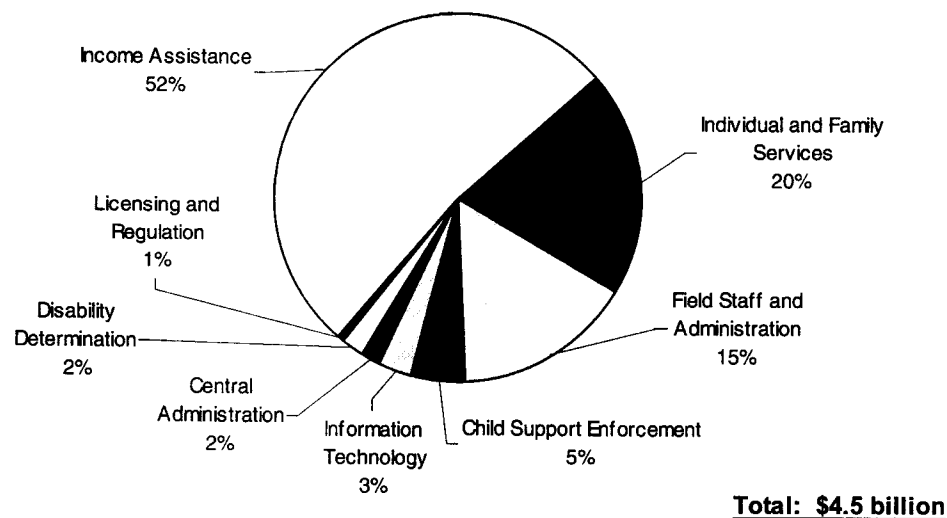
Another 50 programs are slated for large cuts but not outright elimination, for savings of \$7.4 billion.

The Office of Management and Budget said the programs on its ambitious list are those "not getting results or not fulfilling essential priorities."

Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services (DHS) helps families and individuals meet financial, medical, and social service needs. DHS programs provide financial assistance and medical assistance to Michigan's low-income population; move people toward self-sufficiency through employment and training services; work to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children and vulnerable adults through direct services; and regulate and license adult and child care agencies, facilities, and homes. DHS directs the operations of income assistance and service programs through a network of county based offices. *The Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year 2007 recommends total funding of \$4.5 billion, of which \$1.2 billion is general fund.*

Over Half of the Department Budget Supports Income Assistance Programs for Low Income Families and Individuals



Budget Highlights/Income Assistance Programs

- Family Independence Program -- The Governor's fiscal year 2007 budget recommends \$374 million for the Family Independence Program, supporting 77,640 cases that include 155,280 children.
- Jobs, Education and Training Pilot (JET) -- Beginning in the current fiscal year and continuing into fiscal year 2007, the JET pilot is designed to reduce long-term welfare dependence through enhanced and integrated service delivery to Family Independence Program recipients. This will be accomplished through a comprehensive intake process; family, employment and training services; and post-employment services and support. Pilot savings of \$11 million general fund are included in the Executive Budget.
- Child Day Care -- The Governor's budget recommends funding of \$468 million to support safe, quality child day care for qualifying families, anticipating a caseload of 63,600 that includes 127,200 children. Michigan's child day care program is a critical support that helps families become employed and self-sufficient.

- State Disability Assistance -- The Governor's budget maintains the State Disability Assistance program as a safety net for disabled adults who are unable to work, but who do not qualify for federal Supplemental Security Income benefits. This program's \$36.3 million budget funds a caseload of 11,900 for fiscal year 2007.
- Food Assistance Program -- Over \$1.2 billion in federal funds is recommended for the Food Assistance Program to increase the food purchasing power of 526,800 low-income households.
- State Emergency Relief and Home Energy and Weatherization Assistance -- The Governor's budget for DHS includes funding of \$136.6 million to support the home heating credit, energy-related crisis payments, and weatherization activities to make homes more energy efficient. Federal and state funds of \$21.9 million are recommended for emergency assistance to families and individuals.
- Error Reduction Efforts -- A joint project with the Department of Community Health to identify and close Medicaid cases that are not eligible for assistance is included in the budget recommendation. Medicaid savings of \$8.6 million general fund from this case review project are reflected in the Department of Community Health budget. In addition, the Front End Eligibility project will target financial assistance applications for intensive review to avoid errors before cases are open. Front End Eligibility will save \$8.6 million in state funds in fiscal year 2007.

Budget Highlights/Social Services Program

- Children's Protective Services -- Protecting Michigan's children from harm is an essential government function. To meet this important obligation, the Governor's Executive Budget includes funding for 51 additional children's protective services staff, increasing staffing levels almost 7 percent.
- Children's Foster Care -- Children who have been placed in out-of-home care because they cannot be protected from abuse and neglect in their own homes are served through the Children's Foster Care Program. This budget includes \$206.6 million to provide care, supervision, and a home until children are either returned to their birth parents or are adopted. The fiscal year 2007 foster care caseload for out of home care is 10,600 children. Over \$74 million is invested in family preservation services and child abuse and neglect prevention to help keep children safe with their families.
- Adoption Subsidy Program -- This budget finances the Adoption Subsidy program at a funding level of \$234 million that supports a caseload of 27,300 children. Adoption subsidy provides financial and medical support to adoptive families to encourage the placement of special needs children.
- Juvenile Justice Services -- The Governor's budget recommends \$256.4 million for Juvenile Justice Services, including the Child Care Fund. These services provide treatment, residential placement and community support services for youth. The state also operates a number of residential facilities that provide comprehensive youth treatment programs.

Other Budget Highlights

- Office of Children and Adult Licensing (OCAL) -- With a budget of \$22.6 million, the Office of Children and Adult Licensing works to insure the protection of vulnerable children and adults by regulating adult foster care homes, homes for the aged, child day care homes and centers, child caring institutions, child placing agencies, and camps.
- Child Support Program -- This budget invests over \$213 million in the child support program to help Michigan's families obtain financial support from absent parents, including \$172 million for the local Friends of the Court to establish and enforce child support orders. In addition, over \$50 million is budgeted for child support automation activities.
- The Governor's recommendation adds \$78 million general fund to address a shortfall of federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds. TANF is a capped federal funding source. In prior years, Michigan had significant TANF reserves to carry forward from one year to the next. However, Michigan's TANF reserves have now been depleted. This budget recommendation replaces these unavailable federal funds with state funds in order to maintain critical human services programs.
- The budget adds \$5.5 million in fiscal year 2007 for continued development of the Bridges Project. This integrated service delivery system will provide significant workload and administrative efficiencies in local Human Services offices.

Fiscal Year 2006 Supplemental

The Governor recommends a fiscal year 2006 supplemental of \$1.9 million in federal child care development funds to continue services that support day care quality activities; \$300,000 in federal and state restricted funds to support children's trust fund activities; and \$600,000 in local revenues to help fund child support enforcement activities. The Governor also recommends supplemental appropriations to add 51 children's protective services staff. In addition, \$38.7 million general fund is included to address projected federal revenue shortfalls. These shortfalls occur in capped federal fund sources, primarily the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant and the Social Services block grant. A portion of the general fund increase is offset with \$6.6 million in new federal child day care funds for a net increase of \$32.1 million general fund.

Fiscal Year 2007 Governor's Recommendation
Department of Human Services
(\$ in Thousands)

	FY05 Appropriation	FY06 Current Law	FY07 Recommended
GF/GP	\$1,077,374.4	\$1,082,196.4	\$1,190,896.7
All Funds	\$4,302,524.7	\$4,437,366.9	\$4,471,804.5
	% Change - GF/GP	0.4%	10.0%
	% Change - All Funds	3.1%	0.8%

Activities	GF/GP	All Funds
GOAL: MAKE MICHIGAN'S PEOPLE HEALTHIER AND OUR FAMILIES STRONGER		
Income Assistance:		
Food Assistance Program	\$0.0	\$1,221,340.9
Family Independence Program	\$221,291.3	\$368,783.6
Low Income Energy and Weatherization Assistance	\$0.0	\$134,927.9
SSI State Supplementation	\$62,028.4	\$62,028.4
State Emergency Relief	\$24,783.2	\$41,662.0
State Disability Assistance	\$27,166.9	\$36,281.7
Individual and Family Services:		
Purchased Care, Treatment, and Supervision of Youth	\$179,189.7	\$398,970.1
Adoption Services and Subsidies	\$93,383.9	\$248,323.3
Juvenile Justice: State Facilities and Federal Grants	\$33,717.4	\$76,088.4
Family Preservation and Prevention Services	\$1,778.0	\$74,381.7
Community Services Block Grant	\$0.0	\$27,159.9
Domestic Violence and Rape Prevention Services	\$1,985.1	\$17,229.0
Refugee Assistance	\$0.0	\$12,700.3
Other Individual and Family Services	\$3,690.1	\$30,729.4
Field Staff and Administration	\$271,367.0	\$695,799.1
Child Support Enforcement	\$14,970.8	\$213,625.3
Information Technology	\$38,852.9	\$136,083.9
Central Administration and Support	\$28,284.4	\$75,931.5
Disability Determination Services	\$2,974.6	\$84,267.0
Licensing and Regulation	\$9,966.3	\$22,608.6
GOAL: IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT		
Child Day Care Services	\$168,324.1	\$468,188.9
GOAL: SUSTAIN AND CREATE BUSINESS INVESTMENT AND JOBS IN MICHIGAN		
Employment and Training Support	\$7,142.6	\$24,693.6
Total FY 2007 Recommendation	\$1,190,896.7	\$4,471,804.5

GOP lawmakers oppose higher fees, eliminating tax exemptions

2/9/2006, 6:28 p.m. ET

By **DAVID EGGERT**

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Republicans who control the Legislature said Thursday they oppose Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposal to raise more money for the state budget by closing tax exemptions and raising liquor license fees.

In a familiar refrain, they also criticized the Democratic governor for wanting to cut state aid for students at private colleges. They were generally receptive, however, to the proposed overall 2 percent increase for public universities.

"I think two percent is a great start," said Sen. Mike Goschka, R-Brant, who chairs the Senate Appropriations Higher Education Subcommittee. "But I don't think it's appropriate to essentially decimate the Tuition Grant program."

The program offers tuition grants to private college students.

Granholm has tried unsuccessfully to cut the grants in the past, arguing that citizens want the money to go to public university students.

House Appropriations Chairman Scott Hummel, R-DeWitt, said the House will not agree to close or modify 15 tax exemptions that currently are granted for prison sales, international phone calls and driver education vehicles, among other things.

"The governor said her budget proposal is living within our means," he said. "My definition of living within our means is spending only what we have and not balancing the budget with tax and fee increases and one-time shifts."

Granholm criticized Hummel's response.

"To preclude a solution before the budget book even gets cracked is premature," she said, questioning why lawmakers would turn their backs on ending tax exemptions two months after finding them acceptable.

"They've already voted for them," she said.

But Hummel said Republicans agreed to 10 of the exemptions last year because they would have gotten a business tax cut in return.

Some lawmakers also questioned Granholm's proposal to increase the so-called "bed tax" paid by hospitals and health maintenance organizations who treat Medicaid patients. The higher tax

revenue could be used to leverage more federal money, but Republicans said rural hospitals could lose out in favor of urban areas.

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Shirley Johnson, R-Troy, also took issue with the governor's proposed spending on a building project at Eastern Michigan University. Controversy erupted in recent years when the school built a \$5.3 million president's home.

"I'm not supporting anything for Eastern until they sell their \$6 million mansion," Johnson said.

Proposed '07 budget for universities

Operations funding for the state's three main research universities would increase 2 percent under Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposed budget for the 2007 budget year, which begins Oct. 1. Funding for the state's other 12 universities would increase by a base of 1 percent, but would vary based on other factors including affordability and degree completion. The funding proposal (dollar amounts in millions, rounded off):

University	FY'06	FY'07 proposal	Percent change
Central Michigan	\$76.1	\$77.6	1.95
Eastern Michigan	\$49.8	\$50.8	2.00
Ferris State	\$61.1	\$62.4	2.16
Grand Valley State	\$12.8	\$13.0	1.56
Lake Superior State	\$283.7	\$289.4	2.00
Michigan State	\$48.0	\$48.9	1.87
Michigan Tech	\$45.1	\$45.9	1.84
Northern Michigan	\$80.7	\$81.7	1.24
Oakland	\$27.5	\$28.3	2.92
Saginaw Valley State	\$31.8	\$32.7	2.83
UM-Ann Arbor	\$24.7	\$25.3	2.21
UM-Dearborn	\$214.7	\$219.0	2.00
UM-Flint	\$109.7	\$111.8	1.92
Wayne State	\$149.8	\$151.8	1.34
Western Michigan	\$141.8	\$143.8	1.41
Total	\$1,419.8	\$1,448.2	2.00

Highlights of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's budget proposal

AGRICULTURE

- Allocates \$23.5 million to support the food safety program.
- Allocates \$5.6 million for the bovine tuberculosis program.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- Gives an across-the-board 2 percent operational funding increase for each of the state's 28 community colleges.

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- Includes state and federal funds to begin phasing in a new health insurance program for families and individuals without employer-based health care.
- Increases state and federal spending by 7 percent to cover the \$7.3 billion bill for Medicaid.
- Increases the so-called "bed tax" paid by hospitals and health maintenance organizations that treat Medicaid patients. That revenue could be used to get more federal money, giving the state about \$42 million more to put toward Medicaid.

CORRECTIONS

- No new funding for more prison beds.
- Recommends closing Camp Brighton in Livingston County and transferring its inmates to the Huron Valley complex in Ypsilanti.
- Continues funding of more than \$12 million for the Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, which aims to reduce recidivism.

EDUCATION

- Spends about \$300 million to increase minimum per-pupil funding for K-12 students by \$200 to \$7,075. Some districts get more than \$11,000 per student.
- Spends \$15 million for after-school or summer programs in math, science and computer technology for middle schoolers.
- Increases funding for adult education by \$4 million to \$25 million.
- Restores funding for hearing and vision testing in preschool and early elementary grades to \$5.2 million.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

- Sets aside \$119 million for job training programs, including \$4.4 million to replace lost federal aid.
- Spends \$1.5 million in federal dollars to boost regional alliances that train people for high-demand careers such as health care, education services and financial services.

ENVIRONMENT

- Sets aside \$107 million for low-interest loans to local units of government for wastewater and drinking water projects.
- Spends \$24 million for clean air regulatory efforts, including an effort to reduce the time it takes for a business to get an air permit.

HIGHER EDUCATION

- Increases operational funding by 2 percent. Major research universities — the University of Michigan, Wayne State University and Michigan State University — would get a flat 2 percent increase.

LANSING-AREA SCHOOLS

The proposed budget includes additional money for school districts with declining enrollment. Here are the local districts that qualify, and the additional amount they would receive:

- East Lansing: \$74,962
- Eaton Rapids: \$57,876

- Lansing: \$1.2 million
- Leslie: \$31,799
- Mason: \$47,847
- Owosso: \$168,794
- St. Johns: \$65,718
- Williamston: \$79,758

The state's other 12 universities get a 1 percent base increase, with the rest split up based on factors such as affordability and the percentage of students completing degrees.

- Proposes \$230 million for scholarships and student financial aid programs, including \$127.7 million for the Michigan Merit Award. Merges the Michigan Tuition Grant program for private college students with a competitive scholarship program for those attending public universities and gradually phases out state aid to

students at private schools.

HUMAN SERVICES

- Sets up the Jobs, Education and Training pilot program to provide intensive services to long-term welfare recipients.
- Increases staff by 7 percent for children's protective services.
- Raises the minimum wage to \$6.60 an hour statewide for in-home workers who assist the elderly and disabled.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Keeps revenue-sharing payments to local governments at \$1.1 billion.

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Increases state restricted support for maintaining state parks by \$3.5 million, bringing total support to \$46.8 million.
- Maintains \$45 million in spending to manage and protect state forests and other wild lands, including fire protection.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- Gives \$120 million of \$138.4 million in federal homeland security funding to local first responders.
- Includes \$10.7 million for grants to programs to prevent automobile theft.

TRANSPORTATION

- Spends 5.8 percent more on state highway maintenance, at \$275.2 million.
- Increases total transportation funding by 1.6 percent, to \$3.4 billion.
- Provides more than \$2.3 billion for state and local road and bridge construction and economic development projects.

Source: Michigan Department of Management and Budget

Budget plan protects schools, social services

February 10, 2006

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF

FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

LANSING -- Public schools and people who care for the elderly would get more state money. Cities, villages and townships that rely on revenue sharing would not.

Local bus systems would get more state aid, while hospitals would pay a higher state tax, under Gov.

Jennifer Granholm's proposed 2006-07 budget revealed Thursday to lawmakers, who grumbled about tax increases and cuts in college scholarships.

Facing another lean year of tax revenues as the state's economy struggles, Granholm's \$42.5-billion spending plan largely protects social services like Medicaid from cuts, while it boosts spending for education.

The haggling with the Legislature in months to come -- a budget must be passed by Sept. 30 -- will be over the \$9.4 billion in the general fund.

School districts would receive \$200 per pupil more than this year, so that no district would spend less than \$7,075 per pupil next school year.

The state's 15 public universities would get an average increase of 2% in state aid, their first increase in five years.

State revenue-sharing money for local governments would be frozen for a third straight year at \$1.1 billion, leaving them to cope with inflation.

"We've had to cut 30 positions in the city by attrition over the last five years," said Robert Cady, Trenton's administrator. "I'm down to counting pennies now."

To encourage more elderly and disabled people to stay in their homes rather than rely on Medicaid to pay for nursing homes, Granholm proposed raising minimum wages for in-home workers to \$6.60 an hour.

A proposal to raise a tax on hospitals stirred grumbling among some lawmakers, who said it would benefit hospitals that care for low-income Medicaid patients at the expense of those that don't.

"Beaumont's going to scream at me," said Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, referring to the large hospital within her district that sees few Medicaid patients.

"That will really hit them big time."

Medicaid health care for 1.5 million adults and children in the state continues to strain the budget. Granholm would increase funding of the \$7.5-billion Medicaid program by \$205 million.

School officials welcomed the proposed \$200-per-pupil increase in state aid, but said it's not enough to keep some districts from sliding into deficits. Gary Faber, superintendent for the West Bloomfield school district, said he expects to recommend \$5 million in cuts for next year to his school board.

"Many school districts are on the brink of being in deficit," he said. "The \$200 helps pay the increased expenses, but it won't cover it."

The budget would cut \$127 million from programs, including tuition aid for future students of private colleges. The Tuition Grant Program currently spends \$58 million.

Instead, the program would be combined with a competitive scholarship program open to all college students, to create a \$63-million college tuition fund.

"Taxpayers would rather support public institutions first," Granholm said Thursday.

Republican lawmakers, who hold majorities in both houses of the Legislature, opposed proposals to cut the scholarship program for private colleges and a proposal to close \$111 million in so-called tax loopholes.

"This year should be easier for us to balance the budget, so the fact that she's pursuing tax increases is a confusing message," said House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi.

Contact **CHRIS CHRISTOFF** at 517-372-8660. Staff writers Dawson Bell, Kathleen Gray and Chastity Pratt contributed to this report.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

\$28 million: Revenue from proposed bed tax on hospitals to offset higher Medicaid costs

\$29 million: Reduction in scholarships for students at private colleges

Zero: Additional prison beds needed. It's the first time in 20 years that inmate numbers were stable in state prisons.

Zero: Increase in revenue sharing for cities and townships

Dawson Bell

College funding

Under Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposed budget, state universities will receive an average increase of 2%, a \$28-million budget increase.

SCHOOL	% INCREASE
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Lake Superior State	3.86
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Saginaw Valley State	2.92
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U-M Flint	2.47
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U-M Dearborn	2.21
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Grand Valley State	2.16
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Central Michigan	2.09
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Oakland	2.04
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Michigan State	2.00
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U-M Ann Arbor	2.00
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Wayne State	2.00
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Eastern Michigan	1.95
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Northern Michigan	1.84
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Michigan Technological	1.79
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Ferris State	1.74
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Western Michigan	1.55
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Sources: State of Michigan, Governor's office

NOVIA KNIGHT/Detroit Free Press

Loopholes, New Bonding, Medicaid Ruffle Feathers

Budget Director Mary **LANNOYE** hadn't even delivered what may be her last budget presentation to a joint legislative committee and the House Appropriations Chairman had told *MIRS* the administration's plan to close \$111 million in tax "loopholes" was "dead on arrival."

A typically stoic Senate Appropriations Vice Chair Tony **STAMAS** (R-Midland) went after deputy Budget Director Nancy **DUNCAN** for the administration planning on asking for bids on \$100 million in "signature" municipal bonding projects without that money being set aside first by the Legislature.

Republicans questioned whether the administration should count on more Medicaid mystery money, cash Michigan could receive if the cards fall right in Washington but cash that could conceivably never make it to Lansing by 2007.

And so went the last budget offering in Granholm's first term. Compared to years past, where around \$1 billion needed to be found to balance the coming year's budget, the administration needed *only* \$408 million to fill this hole.

They did it with \$127 million in hard cuts, \$111 million in "tax loophole" closures, a \$23 million liquor license fee increase, \$42 million in more Medicaid money the state hopes Washington sends this way and \$72 million in fund shifts. The state also has \$80 million leftover from last year it can use and is posed to sell \$28 million in public land, \$18 of which is forestland.

The budget also took advantage of a flush School Aid Fund (SAF) by moving \$27.7 million from the SAF to the General Fund.

Once again, there was no general tax increase offered. No major ox being gored. No prisons or state police posts being shut down. Even Sikkema's after-budget press release about the governor apparently spending \$900 million more than what the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference said we had was explained away without much splash. Apparently, Sikkema didn't include \$600 million saved by a freeze revenue sharing.

Education is going to get \$362 million more than it got last year under the governor's budget. There's no money for state revenue sharing increases to municipalities. Higher Education is getting \$34 million more.

"I am once again proud to offer a balanced budget that proves we can live within our means while investing in our future," Granholm said.

That left only a handful of leftovers and a couple new offerings for the Republican leadership to turn their nose up. Leading the list is the \$111 million in tax

expenditures/loopholes/increases the governor proposed/re-proposed.

Around \$40.4 million of these loopholes were passed last fall as part of the alleged tax cut agreement the administration made with legislative leaders. Many of them have been introduced before.

However, House Appropriations Chair Scott **HUMMEL** (R-DeWitt) ruled all \$111 million off the table 90 minutes before the presentation, adding that it would be a disservice to the taxpayers if the House couldn't find \$100 million in program cuts to avoid what some would view as a tax-increase package.

Granholm told reporters after the presentation that for anybody to crack the book on the budget before it's even presented is "premature." She noted that Republicans didn't seem to have a problem with tax expenditures a couple months ago and questioned why they would be off the table now.

The House Democrats' lead on the Appropriations Committee, Rep. Gretchen **WHITMER** (D-East Lansing), said she was appalled that Hummel violated his word by broadcasting what was in the budget before it was officially announced. *MIRS* noted both Tuesday and Wednesday that the loopholes would be in the budget, but that information was verified through background information, not official sources.

"To rule something off before we get in here and have the budget presented is just a huge lack of good faith, I'm just surprised," Whitmer said. "They've already passed half of them. To say it's off the table is just ludicrous."

Whitmer said the tax package and last year's budget were all negotiated as part of the same track. In her mind, the Republicans didn't live up to last year's agreed-to loopholes because they sent the governor a couple of "loophole" bills that looked significantly different than what was allegedly agreed to. Six loophole bills were signed. The two perceived bad eggs were vetoed. Everything was tie-barred. Nothing went into effect (See "*Securitization In, Tax Plan Out*," 11/21/05).

In his defense, Hummel said those bills were passed in the context of a tax cut. The Republicans were giving up something to get tax cuts for the manufacturing sector.

"That isn't the case now," he said. "We promised it in the context of a tax cut. She chose to veto them. That's off the table now ... That's gone."

Asked if this is a "flip-flop" on his part, Hummel said, "I don't think it's flip-flopping ... That was a different discussion. Living within our means, not seeking additional tax revenue from the taxpayers of Michigan in the form of increased taxes or fee increases."

Also, Republicans didn't like getting cut out of the loop on a plan to offer \$100 million in state bonding cap money for local "signature" infrastructure projects, like a convention center or some other major project.

Granholm used the Grand Rapids Convention Center, the Detroit Zoo and Cobo Hall as examples of state-local partnerships. She envisions this money being used for projects that will encourage tourism, something that can be filed under the "economic

development" folder.

The administration will iron out the details on how much the state is kicking in later. However, Stamas seemed irritated today that the administration would take bid proposals in late spring, before the Legislature had any say into whether it would set aside the \$100 million. Both Stamas and Senate Appropriations Chair Shirley **JOHNSON** (R-Troy) grumbled that the Legislature should have a say at the front end, instead of the back end.

Duncan told the Senate she envisioned the administration awarding individual projects like they do with universities and communities and then letting the Capital Outlay Committee pick and choose which projects should get funded. She noted that to wait until the Legislature approved the general idea of bonding for locals would delay the process.

"At some point, you need to jump over the ledge and get the requests out," Duncan said. "We're not trying to cut you out of the process. If you have a better approach, let us know."

Republicans must be having visions of Granholm grabbing credit for some new, exciting local venture somewhere. Granholm must be smiling at the prospect of putting the Republicans in the role of the bad guy, letting them take credit for sinking a particular local project, like in Baldwin, for instance.

The administration is also balancing the budget on \$42 million in more Medicaid provider money. The state is seeking more federal money to reimburse health maintenance organizations (HMOs) at a higher rate so they can reimburse hospitals at a higher rate.

An increase in this type of quality assessment fee would take more money out of the rural areas and more money into Southeast Michigan where most of the Medicaid money tends to be soaked up, a reality that Rep. Bruce **CASWELL** (R-Hillsdale) found displeasing. He also questioned a \$43 million in savings through federal pharmacy rebates for Medicaid health maintenance organizations.

Through a federal waiver, these rebates will save up to 30 percent on an estimated pharmacy bill of \$387.5 million. The problem is that this program hasn't cleared Congress yet and is an assumption.

Lannoye explained that budgets are always based on assumptions. The budget office has a fairly good track record of figuring out which ones have a chance and which ones don't. Yes, there's a chance this doesn't come together, but the administration feels confident that it will.

Granholt gambles on budget

\$43B proposal relies on closing tax loopholes, hiking fees to increase aid to schools, colleges.

Mark Hornbeck and Charlie Cain / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

February 10, 2006

LANSING -- Public schools, research universities, home health care workers, mass transit riders and the working poor who have no health insurance are the winners in state spending plans for next year laid out by Gov. Jennifer Granholm Thursday.

Losers include liquor store owners, businesses that enjoy certain tax breaks, private college students who need financial aid and municipalities hoping for an increase in the \$1.1 billion state revenue sharing pot for police and fire protection, road repairs and garbage pickup.

But the budget plan is built on potentially shaky ground -- closing a number of tax loopholes and increasing fees. Those proposals already are drawing fire from key members of the Legislature. In addition, the budget is likely to become caught up in intense election year politics, as the governor seeks another four-year term and all 148 legislative seats are up for grabs in November.

The Democratic governor's budget blueprint calls for a 3 percent increase to \$9.2 billion in the general fund -- the state's main checkbook -- and a 2.5 percent boost to \$42.6 billion for the overall budget, including federal dollars and state money automatically dedicated to roads, schools, natural resources and other spending. The next budget year begins Oct. 1.

"This balanced budget for the coming year will create good jobs, protect our families, and educate our children -- without a general tax increase," said state Budget Director Mary Lannoye, the chief architect of the spending proposal.

In response, Republican leaders lampooned Granholm's proposal to spend \$9.2 billion from the general fund when fiscal analysts agreed last month the state is poised to collect only \$8.3 billion.

"I appreciate the governor's efforts to live within our means, but we have different definitions about what that means," said House Appropriations Chairman Scott Hummel, R-DeWitt. "Living within your means doesn't mean raising taxes on somebody or increasing fees."

Granholm replied: "We are presenting a balanced budget as the constitution requires."

The extra spending will rely on a wide range of revenue sources, including onetime gains for the sale of state lands and interest on funds the state will receive under liability settlements with tobacco companies.

The proposal also includes \$111 million from canceling a variety of business tax credits and \$23 million in liquor license fee increases that likely would be passed on to consumers. The tax loophole closings include imposing sales tax on items purchased at prison stores, driver education vehicle purchases, out-of-state purchases by insurance companies and a host of other items. Most were approved by the Legislature in a broader tax cut scheme last year but then vetoed in a dispute with the governor.

About \$127 million in cuts would include nearly \$30 million in reductions in private college tuition programs and \$40 million in savings in Medicaid and welfare by toughening eligibility requirements and starting new cost-recovery programs.

Public schools would get a \$200-per-student state aid increase, bringing the minimum grant to \$7,075 per pupil. That's a 3 percent increase. In addition, Granholm wants \$15 million for after-school programs to mentor middle school students in math, science and computer technology; \$50 million to prop up budgets in districts with declining enrollments; and a \$125 million increase for preschool programs.

"Overall, I'm pleased," said Al Short, chief lobbyist for the Michigan Education Association. "I'd rather have all the money in the per-student grant, but the governor is putting money in programs she sees as important."

State universities would get a 2 percent increase to \$1.4 billion. The three research universities -- Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State -- would get the full raise. The other dozen state universities would get a 1 percent hike and the other 1 percent would be linked to performance, outreach to low-income students and keeping tuition affordable.

Republican lawmakers lauded the overall higher education increase but slammed the plan to cut in half and eventually eliminate private college financial aid to 40,000 students.

"I don't believe it's appropriate to decimate tuition grant money," said Sen. Mike Goschka, R-Brant.

Granholm also wants to raise minimum pay for home health care workers in about half of the state's counties from \$5.15 to \$6.60 an hour. About a third of the \$20 million for that item would go to workers in Wayne County.

The budget calls for a \$1 billion program the governor proposed in her State of the State address last month that would pay health care coverage for 550,000 Michiganders without health insurance. State officials say the money would come from the federal government beginning in April 2007.

A proposed hospital bed tax would generate \$42 million but would leverage federal money to be returned to hospitals that provide services to Medicaid recipients. Hospitals that don't have a large Medicaid clientele would lose under the plan. Critics say some suburban and rural hospitals would subsidize urban hospitals.

"Beaumont (Hospital in Royal Oak) is going to scream at me. That will really hit them big time. There will be a lot of resistance to it," said Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Shirley Johnson, R-Troy.

The proposal includes \$100 million in state bonding for community projects. The state would match local contributions for economic development or tourism "signature" projects, Granholm said, such as expanding Cobo Center or the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

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Granholt's budget plan hits residents in the pocketbook

Governor tries to mask tax hikes by calling them fees

The Detroit News /Editorial

February 10, 2006

While Gov. Jennifer Granholm has repeatedly stressed that she has balanced budgets without seeking a general tax hike, her proposed new spending blueprint relies heavily on fee hikes and closing loopholes. These all add up to tax hikes for Michigan citizens.

The governor's budget for the 2007 fiscal year, introduced Thursday, includes \$111 million in savings from eliminating what the administration calls "tax expenditures." These are credits and exemptions in various state taxes. Eliminating them means taxes will go up for those eligible for the deductions or credits.

The governor and her aides note that about 10 of the proposed 15 so-called tax loopholes were already approved by the Legislature last November. That's true, but they were part of a larger deal that included cuts in the state's onerous Single Business Tax and the use of \$400 million of the state's tobacco windfall for economic development projects.

Because of sloppy work by the Legislature, the governor was able to reject the Single Business Tax cuts while implementing the tobacco windfall. When she rejected the Single Business Tax cuts, the loophole closings also fell by the wayside.

Now, she wants to use the elimination of the loopholes as part of her solution to balancing her proposed \$9.2 billion General Fund budget. (The budget recommendation, including federal funds, totals \$42.6 billion.) Republican legislative leaders have declared these tax increases as dead on arrival. This means that getting a balanced budget will require Granholm and legislative leaders to go back to the drawing board.

In addition, she proposes raising liquor license fees \$23 million and obtaining another \$42 million in savings from Medicaid providers. In practice, lawmakers say, this means some hospitals that don't serve large numbers of Medicaid patients may pay higher taxes they won't get back in Medicaid reimbursement.

State lawmakers last year adopted cuts in machinery taxes paid by manufacturers that amount to \$125 million to \$150 million each year for the next several years, as well as a change in the formula of the Single Business Tax, the state's main business tax, that saves firms another \$25 million to \$30 million a year. The Single Business Tax yields close to \$2 billion a year.

But the elimination of the tax credits and deductions in various taxes, plus the liquor fees and Medicaid taxes, surpass the amount of cuts in business taxes adopted last year.

Granholm said at a press conference Thursday that she remains committed to giving the state a competitive business tax structure, but not at the expense of cutting important state programs in health and education. And to be fair, the governor and her staff did a reasonable job of balancing spending with revenues this year, keeping the increase in General Fund spending to 3 percent and in the overall budget to 2.5 percent.

But unless the state becomes more welcoming to business -- which means having a less burdensome business tax climate -- she or her successor will have to continue stretching increasingly scarce tax dollars as the state's tax base shrivels.

Granholt budget stays the course

Friday, February 10, 2006

By Peter Luke

Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholt's election-year budget seeks to avoid partisan fights with a continuation spending plan for fiscal 2007 topped by a popular \$200-per-pupil increase in state aid to local schools.

"Though there are tough choices in this budget, we think the priorities of Michigan are addressed," Granholt said Thursday. She insisted those priorities are bipartisan, investing in "schools that set high standards, protecting the jobs we have and attracting new jobs, expanding access to affordable health care and protecting our families -- all without raising general taxes."

Lawmakers who will now take Granholt's \$43 billion budget for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 say that it isn't much different from the 2006 budget passed six months ago. They weren't expecting a tax hike and school funding increases are a given since there was agreement last month that the funding would be there to pay for them.

Advocates for groups that rely on state government shrugged their shoulders at a budget that freezes funding or provides only modest increases, even after five years of spending cuts. Little in the budget restores what have been five years of spending reductions.

K-12 public schools will receive the largest budget increase. Growth in sales, income and property taxes in the \$13 billion School Aid Fund will allow the minimum per-pupil grant to jump from \$6,875 to \$7,075 in fiscal 2007.

Granholt is also proposing additional funding for after-school tutoring for middle-school math and science students, early-childhood education programs, and reading and math literacy efforts in early elementary grades.

Universities and community colleges will fare less well, with increases of about 2 percent. The modest increase is unlikely to stem the shift from state aid to student tuition as the primary funding source for university operations.

Michael Boulus, a lobbyist for Michigan's 15 public universities, said the additional state aid is better than a cut, but said the schools are still making up for years of reductions.

"The governor at least has our budget going in the right direction," he said. "Thirty million is nice, but we've lost \$300 million in the last four or five years."

Municipal officials would argue that's nothing compared with the nearly \$2 billion local governments have been shorted by Lansing over the past six years either because of direct cuts or because revenue sharing payments have departed from state formula. Freezing revenue sharing payments in 2007 saves the state, but withholds from cities and townships about \$400 million.

"We've done quite a bit to solve the state's budget problems and we think we deserve an increase," said Summer Minnick, a budget analyst for the Michigan Municipal League.

While Granholt's budget last year proposed closing a range of state facilities, including prisons and Michigan State Police posts, her new plan is sweetened with an offer of \$100 million in new bonding for capital spending projects in lawmakers' districts.

Budget Director Mary Lannoye said the state in the next month would solicit offers from communities for projects she said should be regional in scope, partner with private efforts and promote economic development. Granholm said museums and convention centers are examples of what the new funding could be used for.

Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said lawmakers would have the final say on what, if any, projects are funded. She said given the tight budget, Granholm is seeking to borrow money she can spread around the state during her re-election campaign. Johnson conceded that her own colleagues, also facing re-election this year, would find that appealing as well.

Other spending advocates lamented that for a fifth straight year, the budget contains little new funding for those living in poverty.

Sharon Parks, a budget analyst for the Michigan League for Human Services, said the budget ignores the fact that the those on welfare have not had an adjustment in 12 years in their \$459 monthly grant, which she said was 60 percent below the poverty level. A freeze in reimbursement for physicians and hospitals, following last year's 4-percent cut, will make it harder for the poor to find medical treatment as the pool of willing providers declines.

She called Michigan's constrained fiscal condition a "minimalist view of what state government can and should do. Status quo isn't good enough."

Richard Studley, a budget and tax expert for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, countered that Granholm is laying out a "vision that really grows the size of state government and expands state government's reach."

He cited the proposed Michigan First Healthcare Plan, Granholm's most ambitious budget proposal. Announced last month, Granholm's plan envisions a \$1 billion program covering 550,000 uninsured and funded by the federal government, participating employers, their employees and self-employed workers.

The fiscal 2007 budget assumes \$200 million in federal funding for the program, slated to begin 14 months from now, assuming it receives federal approval. Johnson doubted that a Republican Bush administration would help out Democrat Granholm in an election year. Even if the federal government approves the plan, lawmakers would have to agree to fund it.

Sen. Tom George, R-Kalamazoo, said that despite Michigan's relatively high rate of insured residents, it still has poor rates for obesity and cardiovascular disease. And even before Granholm released her budget, GOP lawmakers were complaining that soaring costs for Medicaid were crowding out funding for schools and cities. Granholm's budget assumes a record Medicaid caseload of more than 1.5 million residents.

"Giving someone an insurance card doesn't make them healthier," said George, one of two physicians in the Legislature.

Prosecutor: Baby still critical

STACY LANGLEY,
The Huron Daily Tribune
02/10/2006

BAD AXE — Officials are saying today is another “very critical day” in the life of the 1-month-old baby boy from Bad Axe who remains in the care of Hurley Medical Center in Flint after sustaining serious head injuries.

Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner isn’t releasing the baby’s name, but said the child born on Jan. 9 is under observation at the hospital and remained in “very critical condition” this morning.

“From what I gather, yesterday and today the baby has remained in the same critical condition — that could be encouraging,” said Gaertner, noting the baby’s condition hasn’t declined. “Yesterday and today are very critical days for swelling of the brain.”

Law enforcement officials began their investigation after a 9-1-1 call by the baby’s 23-year-old father reported the baby boy was having trouble breathing.

The baby was transported by ambulance to Huron Medical Center in Bad Axe Sunday morning and then taken to Hurley Medical Center where he remains today.

Gaertner said his office is working with investigators from the Huron County Sheriff’s Office “looking into allegations of child abuse involving the baby.”

“We’ve been focusing the last 24 hours on working to develop a timeline to determine where the baby was and who was with the baby (when the baby sustained the head injuries). We’re basically focusing on a time period from last Wednesday (Feb. 1) when the baby had a visit with its doctor, up through Sunday morning when he was taken to the hospital. We want to know who was with the baby and when,” Gaertner said. “Right now we’re in the process of interviewing people as to where the child was during that timeframe.”

Gaertner said the case continues to be a top priority, and he’s urging anyone with information about the baby boy to contact the Huron County Sheriff’s Office as soon as possible.

No other information was available as of press time this morning.

Doctor: Baby died of asphyxiation

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer/February 10, 2006

An infant stopped breathing and died in a Battle Creek day care because he couldn't support his head, a doctor testified Thursday in Calhoun County Circuit Court.

Blake Wilson, 12 weeks old, died Oct. 27, 2003, from positional asphyxiation, according to Dr. Joyce DeJong.

"Infants are prone to positional asphyxiation," DeJong said. "If a child is in an awkward or unsafe situation, they are not able to get out of it. When the head flops over and the airway is cut off, it is immediate that they are not breathing anymore."

DeJong testified at the jury trial of Melissa Whitfield, 27, of Battle Creek, charged with manslaughter in the death. If convicted, she faces up to 15 years in prison. Testimony is scheduled to continue today before Judge Conrad Sindt.

Whitfield was operating Melissa's Day Care at 235 Eldred St. when the child died.

DeJong, a pathologist who conducted the autopsy, said serious injury to the child's brain probably would have occurred within four minutes.

She also said the autopsy did not reveal any injuries to the baby, but that she concluded the cause of death after Whitfield told investigators she found the child slumped over in a swing.

"The child slides down and gets into an awkward position and can't get out," DeJong told the jury. "They get into a position where the airway is compromised."

DeJong conceded to Defense Attorney Susan Mladenoff that in this case, information from the scene was critical for her to conclude the cause of death.

"Without the history, I would have determined it to be undetermined," DeJong said.

Mladenoff has questioned the accuracy of the crime scene investigation.

DeJong told Assistant Prosecutor Dierdre Ford there was no evidence that medication given to the child for a cold caused swelling of the airway.

Ford has alleged that Whitfield was negligent because the child was left in the swing in an upright position and without a safety strap, even though Whitfield knew that the baby was too young to keep his head upright.

Whitfield's sister, Kimberly Fleming, who was 16 at the time, testified she fed the baby before placing him in the swing about 5 p.m.

Fleming said she checked on the baby at 5:30 p.m. before leaving for the day.

Erica Bigalow, a day-care licensing consultant from the state, testified that Whitfield said her mother came to the house to pick up Fleming and that Whitfield was near the front door talking to her mother.

Whitfield said she was unable to see the child's swing, Bigalow said.

Whitfield said she found the baby slumped over and not breathing between 5:45 p.m. and 5:50 p.m., Bigalow testified.

Battle Creek Police Department Sgt. Martin Brown, supervisor of the crime lab, testified that Whitfield was standing about 22 1/2 feet away from the swing, but standing in a doorway that obstructed her view.

Brown said Whitfield would have been able to see the child if she stepped back about a foot.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Mich. prosecutor: fugitive priest captured

February 9, 2006
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAY CITY, Mich. -- A Catholic priest sought for more than seven years in Michigan child sex-abuse cases was captured in Colombia and returned to the U.S. for trial, authorities said.

John Steven Rabideau, 44, was arrested Saturday as he tried to enter the country from Ecuador, and is now being held in a jail in Miami-Dade County, Fla., said Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran. He is set to be returned to Michigan next week.

He will be tried on charges that he had sexual contact with three boys in 1985 and 1987, Sheeran said. The boys, now adults, reported the incidents in 1998, and an arrest warrant was issued then.

Rabideau, reached at the Florida jail, declined to comment. "I probably shouldn't talk to you until I talk to a lawyer," he told The Associated Press on Thursday before the phone line went dead.

Sheeran said Rabideau's current status as a priest wasn't known but he had been active in 2004 in the Philippines.

In the mid- to late 1980s, Rabideau was a student in Boston and was connected to a Catholic missionary order. He was visiting relatives in Williams Township at the time of the reported offenses.

Sheeran said Rabideau will face one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. He also will face six counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, each of which carries a maximum penalty of 15 years.

Background checks of school workers falsely show criminal records

Thursday, February 09, 2006

By Ed White

The Grand Rapids Press

Superintendent Andy Booth described the faces of two employees this way: "shock and awe."

Names of the Cedar Springs school workers turned up in a criminal-background check conducted by the state Education Department. Booth called them to his office, did his own investigation and learned the misdemeanors were wrong.

"I'm amazed," Booth said. "People's lives and reputations are at stake. ... If they can't get the MEAP scores straight, I'm not sure they can do this, either."

It is a common reaction in the Grand Rapids area. Spurred by a new state law, the Education Department did a fresh check on public-school employees statewide, mostly to ensure there were no convictions for sex crimes.

But the comb pulled out much more -- and much of it inaccurate, officials said.

In Jenison, three employees were listed as having committed crimes before they were born, Superintendent Tom TenBrink said.

In Kentwood, more than a third of the people on the list did not belong there, and others still were being checked, personnel chief Scott Palczewski said. He declined to say how many.

Forest Hills was told it had three employees tagged with felonies, including larceny over \$100. After checking with the state police, Assistant Superintendent Gloria Graber said she is confident the information was inaccurate.

"There's been total shock and denial" among employees, she said. "The title of one offense was 'precious gem and metal dealer.' Does it mean swiping diamonds?"

Under a 2005 law, schools must get rid of employees who have been convicted of sex crimes. Anyone with other felonies may continue to work if the superintendent and school board agree in writing.

The Education Department has acknowledged errors in the background checks have occurred because of similar names or Social Security numbers. To clear them up, schools are being told to check a state police database or take fingerprints.

"The intentions were good -- safety of kids -- but the quality of the work was not good," Booth said.

Wyoming Public Schools has suspended an employee without pay while it tries to check a conviction reported by the state, said Coni Sullivan, director of human resources. The employee insists the information is wrong. She declined to disclose any other details.

"It's been crazy," Sullivan said, noting the background checks assume guilt until innocence can be proven.

In Grand Rapids, Superintendent Bert Bleke said the state list shows "relatively few felonies and quite a few misdemeanors" but no sex crimes.

"The felonies we've seen would not lead us to suspend anyone," he said. "We think there are some errors but we're not positive yet. We're in the process of finding out."

Schools fingerprint and conduct their own background checks on new hires, but acknowledge that subsequent checks may be infrequent unless they are alerted to a crime.

The Michigan Education Association, which represents teachers, is asking a judge to prevent the Education Department from releasing names to the public. Some Republican lawmakers agree the list should be fixed first. A hearing is set for Friday.

"We should reveal those found guilty of crimes but never those law-abiding individuals who have dedicated their lives to educating our children," Sen. Ron Jelinek, R-Three Oaks, told The Associated Press.

- Press staff writer Barton Deiters contributed to this story.

Correct list of felons sought

Bill would require roll of criminals working in schools be accurate before it's released.

*Marisa Schultz and Christine MacDonald / The Detroit News
February 10, 2006*

Speaker of the House Craig DeRoche updated legislation Thursday to require the list of known criminals working in schools to be accurate before it's released to the public.

The list was created when the state police cross checked the names of 200,000 school employees with its database of known criminals. The results revealed more than 4,600 criminal offenses attributed to school workers. Of those, 2,200 were felonies including murder, sex crimes and kidnapping.

Since school districts received letters last week notifying them whether any of their employees were listed as criminals, many complaints about accuracy have arisen. Some employees were listed as having committed crimes, when indeed they had no criminal history. State officials attributed the mistakes to common names and identity thefts.

DeRoche first introduced legislation to make the list public. However, he said, he didn't realize at the time the state didn't double check the data before alerting districts.

"The (revised) bill strikes the proper balance between the public's right to know who has access to their children with an employee's right not to be falsely accused," said DeRoche, R- Novi. "We would have assumed that the Department of Education checked these lists for accuracy before alarming our school districts, but we are finding out this was unfortunately not the case."

In light of the accuracy concerns, the Michigan Education Association has protested the release of the full list to the public. Lawyers for the union won a temporary restraining order Jan. 30 barring the list's release.

Union spokeswoman Margaret Trimer-Hartley said accuracy "has been our concern all along." She hasn't seen the language of DeRoche's bill, but said the union supports the idea of making sure the information is right before it's released.

State Police officials have said name checks are not 100 percent and will produce some "false positives." The police must conduct the background checks on school employees every six months under new legislation to protect kids from predators. Also on Thursday, the American Federation of Teachers Michigan, called for the state to recall the lists because of errors.

"These lists cannot be used until they are determined to be accurate," said David Hecker, president of the union.

Department of Education spokesman Martin Ackley has said that officials realized errors may occur, but removing dangerous people from schools was top priority.

DeRoche's legislation would exempt the criminal history from the Freedom of Information Act for 14 days after the schools receive the names so school officials have an opportunity to verify.

School officials in Center Line said the state's background checks mistakenly matched two of their employees with felony convictions. The two support staffers were on paid leave for nearly four days while the district waited for fingerprint verification.

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Bill addresses lists of felons in schools

February 10, 2006

Detroit Free Press

Michigan House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, updated proposed legislation Thursday to ensure that parents have accurate lists of convicted felons and sex offenders working in public schools before they are distributed.

The update proposes making the lists exempt from the Freedom of Information Act for 14 days after schools receive the names so the backgrounds can be verified.

The Michigan Education Association called on DeRoche last week to withdraw the list of school employees with criminal convictions because of inaccuracies.

DeRoche said the updated bill would address concerns about falsely accusing school employees. "We would have assumed that the Department of Education checked these lists for accuracy before alarming our school districts, but we are finding out this was unfortunately not the case," he said.

By Ben Schmitt

DeRoche Wants Correct Sex Offender List

House Speaker Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Novi) made a statement today agreeing with one Sen. Ron **JELINEK** (R-Three Oaks) made on the Senate floor Wednesday about an "incomplete" sex offender list State Police put together and gave to schools for their input.

"If these criminal checks are going to be successful in keeping our kids safe, it is crucial that the state make sure these lists are an accurate reflection of the truth," DeRoche said.

Later in the day, Rep. Rick **BAXTER** (R-Concord) introduced legislation that would give school districts and officials 14 days to verify and correct any errors before releasing the list.

This bill came about to "fix" a piece of legislation DeRoche introduced last week that required school districts to release the names of all felons and sex offenders working in schools (See "*Jelinek Wants Sex Offender List Modified*," 2/8/06).

There was an outcry over DeRoche's legislation because teachers who have parking tickets but do not have criminal convictions are being erroneously added to the list. The new legislation is supposed to prevent these teachers from getting their names smeared.

Before the new legislation was introduced, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) called for the inaccurate lists to be recalled and withheld until their accuracy can be checked.

"The safety of all Michigan children is a top priority," said AFT President David **HECKER**. "AFT Michigan agrees that anyone who is a danger to students should not be working in schools. However, we hope it was the intention of these laws that development of a list of school employees meant an accurate list. To have proceeded without such assurances showed a gross disregard for the dedicated employees who educate our children."

Both Jelinek and DeRoche are asking the Department of Education to get the list right before sending it out to districts and the public.

"The bill strikes the proper balance between the public's right to know who has access to their children with an employee's right not to be falsely accused," DeRoche said. "We would have assumed that the Department of Education checked these lists for accuracy before alarming our school districts, but we are finding out this was unfortunately not the case."

Judge bars releasing list of school workers with convictions

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer
Feb 10, 12:13 PM EST

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- The state Department of Education cannot immediately make public a list of school workers with criminal convictions because it is inaccurate, an Ingham County judge ruled Friday.

Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk said releasing the statewide list to the media would violate the integrity of teachers and other employees who are wrongfully on the list. Checking the criminal history of more than 200,000 school employees was prompted by a new law targeting sex offenders in schools.

"Surely the public interest is not served by having inaccurate information posed to them," Draganchuk said while issuing a preliminary injunction.

The ruling followed testimony from four teachers who were flagged for drug and other offenses but said they had never committed any crimes.

Tina VanSickle, a teacher from Mecosta County, said she was on the list for seven misdemeanors and one felony.

"I haven't done anything wrong," she testified. "To have something attached to my name that's not true is not right."

The Detroit News filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the list in January, but both the education department and teachers' unions say school districts need time to verify and doublecheck names on the list.

Draganchuk last week issued a temporary restraining order against releasing the list.

It is unclear what legal action may occur next. A Michigan State Police official testified that his agency hopes to put together an entirely new list by March 1.

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Education: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>

Michigan Education Association: <http://www.mea.org> 2006 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed. Learn more about our Privacy Policy.

Annual show to benefit Branch County Council for Children

By Roland Stoy/Staff Writer

The Coldwater Reporter

COLDWATER — Fashions come and go, but the horror of child abuse remains, a domestic Holocaust destroying the spirits and lives of the most vulnerable.

Organizations such as the Branch County Council for Children (BCCC) stand against the ongoing tragedy of abuse and neglect and citizens can support them in the struggle by being aware, helping to educate others and in particular by supporting the third annual Spring Fashion Show, to be held Saturday, Feb. 25 from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Dearth Community Center.

Denice Mack, victim/witness advocate for the Branch County prosecutor's office, said there would also be a silent auction.

Less charity beginning at home

Local nonprofits losing cash to national causes
Friday, February 10, 2006
BY LIZ COBBS

Local affiliates of three major national charities are now feeling the financial pinch from local charitable dollars going to assist victims of the Gulf Coast hurricanes and Indian Ocean tsunami last year.

Officials at the Washtenaw County and Livingston County offices of the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity and the Salvation Army say the state's faltering economy also is likely a factor in the decline in local donations.

The nonprofits say they are not cutting back on services, at least not yet. Instead, they are redoubling their fundraising efforts and, in one case, resorting to a reorganization that eliminates a couple of paid staff positions.

A recent national survey shows that many in the nonprofit sector believe that the climate for charitable giving will improve, but officials with the Red Cross chapter in Washtenaw County said they couldn't wait. The agency went through a restructuring last month, reducing the number of staff positions from 20 to 18.5.

The move was made to better use the hundreds of new volunteers who signed up last year, according to Pamela Horiszny, the chapter's executive director.

"We're really looking at a new era of volunteerism in the chapter," she said. "It's a new way of thinking internally. One of our big challenges in this fiscal year was to significantly increase our volunteer base and it happened almost overnight."

Agency officials first considered restructuring last July 1, at the beginning of the current fiscal year, when they anticipated a deficit in the local agency's \$1.6 million budget.

"We had a target in the terms of downsizing, but the hurricane hit and we needed everybody that we had on staff," Horiszny said.

By the end of 2005, the Red Cross' Washtenaw County chapter received nearly \$2.8 million in local donations for the national organization's hurricane relief efforts and \$1.5 million for South Asia tsunami relief.

After Hurricane Katrina, more than 1,400 people signed up to volunteer. Of that number, more than 800 people were selected to take 8 to 10 hours of disaster services training, and 359 people were sent to the Gulf Coast to relief efforts. The chapter is still deploying local volunteers to the region, Horiszny said.

At the end of the year, the chapter's direct mail solicitations did well but the major donor year-end solicitations were down, Horiszny said. Overall, the chapter is about \$50,000 lower than anticipated.

Donations are also down at the Red Cross chapter in Livingston County, said executive director Diane Serra.

"A lot of people who ordinarily would have donated to us around the holidays designated their donations for hurricane victims," Serra said.

The chapter raised more than \$375,000 for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts and that was very important, Serra said.

"There is still a very great need there and will be for a long time," she said.

The chapter, however, is no longer formally collecting funds for that disaster, focusing now on local needs, Serra said.

The Livingston County Red Cross, hoping to recoup its losses, will host a World War II-themed fundraising dinner-dance April 29 with big band music by the Johnny Knorr Orchestra, Serra said.

A hangar at Livingston County's Spencer J. Hardy Airport will be decked out with a facsimile officer's club, an army hospital and the "Yankee Lady," the B-17 plane based at the Yankee Air Museum at Willow Run Airport.

Habitat for Humanity in Livingston County has been less severely afflicted, according to executive director Larry Pfeil. A fundraiser that involved auctioning bear statues painted by area artists was successful for the second year, he said. And the group's store on Rickett Road is doing well, "but it probably helps that people are actually buying something," he added.

Still, Pfeil said, he has noticed diminished local giving.

"There seems to be a mindset here that, to help people, you have to get on an airplane and go somewhere. And people become tapped out; so many organizations are trying to (generate donations) .. and they're all good causes."

In Ann Arbor, Habitat For Humanity of Huron Valley's \$1 million general fund budget is currently \$40,000 to \$50,000 shorter than anticipated, said development director Andra Bostian Ferguson.

HHHV relies on grants and donations since it does not receive money from Habitat for Humanity International or from the federal government.

Its \$1 million general fund budget includes payment for rent, overhead and seven staff members, of whom four are full-time.

"We run a lean organization so we can do the mission," Bostian Ferguson said.

The cost of building a home has risen from \$55,000 to \$75,000 in the three years she's been at the organization, Bostian Ferguson said. That cost includes land acquisition, building materials and supplies, and site development.

Officials at the Salvation Army in both Livingston and Washtenaw counties said the public was generous in its support to the annual red kettle campaigns. However, Maj. Rick Carroll, the Salvation Army's Washtenaw County coordinator, said the mail request campaign was down about \$50,000.

Capt. Derek Rose, co-director of the Salvation Army in Livingston County, said its mail request campaign exceeded its goal, but donations dropped significantly. "We raised nearly \$115,000 by mail this year, but we raised \$126,000 last year," he said.

Rose said he hopes to increase local giving during this year's fundraising activities through increased marketing efforts. "We're looking to advertise a lot more in the papers and on the radio," he said.

Habitat for Humanity's Pfeil in Livingston County pointed out that the still sagging economy, most recently reflected in Ford Motor Co.'s recent announcement of the Wixom plant closing, has certainly taken its toll on charitable giving.

"The housing market is off, foreclosures are up," he said. "People are hunkering down, for want of a better way to put it."

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Students collect clothes, supplies for adopted town

Thursday, February 09, 2006
By Jaclyn Roeschke
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Rebekeh Walling said she will never forget the devastation she saw in Bayou La Batre, Ala.

The Northwest High School senior was part of a group of 135 Northwest, Grass Lake and Hanover-Horton students and chaperones who headed south in December to help rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

After seeing demolished homes and meeting with families who lost everything in Bayou La Batre, Northwest students and teacher Marnie Hade decided to collect clothing and bedding donations for the town.

"People don't realize exactly how bad it is down there," said Walling, 17. "They think that because it's been a couple of months it's all cleaned up. I saw things down there I wouldn't wish on anybody. I think if people here lost everything, they would want somebody to help them."

Hade said when students traveled there in December, they were shocked to see the amount of devastation in the small town.

Students helped town officials set up a tent that was used for a community outreach program. Officials in the town hoped to distribute clothing and other items to residents, but barely any items had been donated.

"One woman needed an outfit for a job interview," Hade said. "There was also a little boy who came in with only a pair sandals on and he wanted shoes."

Hade said after the experience in Bayou La Batre, students "kind of adopted" the town. They've been collecting shoes, new and slightly used clothing of all sizes, bedding, diapers, toys, children's books and winter and summer outerwear.

She said Northwest Community Schools and local churches already have collected five palettes full of donations that will head south on a truck Feb. 16. Donations can be dropped off at the school during regular school hours.

FOC to provide spot for estranged couples to swap kids

Thursday, February 09, 2006

By Larry O'Connor

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The state police's Jackson post parking lot often serves as a demilitarized zone for divorced parents with children.

Perhaps because of lingering bitterness, some estranged couples only feel comfortable completing custody exchanges with law enforcement nearby. For that reason, the visitors lot at Cooper Street and Parnall Road has become a staging area.

"In divorce situations, there are a lot of hard feelings," said Sgt. Timothy McGaffigan. "We're just kind of a central meeting place."

With a new \$20,000 Access and Visitation grant, Jackson County Friend of the Court officials want to remove the hostility and awkwardness of those encounters -- at least for the kids.

The state Court Administrator's Office grant will allow exchanges to take place under supervision at FOC offices on Lansing Avenue, said Andy Crisenbery, Friend of the Court administrator. Parents will arrive and leave separately. The supervised process also allows staff to document parents showing up late or any other problems.

Those supervised exchanges will take place on Friday and Sunday nights. Couples will pay a minimum of \$10 for the service, said Janet Gage, Friend of the Court attorney and referee.

The grant will allow supervised exchanges for up to 10 families a weekend, Gage said.

The Child and Parent Center at 606 Greenwood Place will assist in problem cases.

The pilot program is designed to teach parents how to conduct those meetings without the rancor.

"Once they get used to a regular process, hopefully the parents are able to move on," Gage said.

Foster care rules: Keep politics out

*Thursday, February 09, 2006
Grand Rapids Press Editorial*

Michigan may or may not need any new rules governing adult foster care services, but there definitely is no call for regulations clearly discriminating against non-union homes.

That blatant bias has shown up in drafts of rules drawn up by the Granholm administration's Department of Human Services. Now a series of bills in the Senate, backed largely by Grand Rapids-area lawmakers, aims to forbid any such tilt. This is apparently necessary legislation. The government, very simply, should be neither assisting union organizing efforts or obstructing them. Beyond that, the union forces that are backing the labor preferences should know that the tactic could backfire on them when a less labor-friendly administration inevitably rewrites the rules.

The administration has had the rules in draft form for months, long enough for them to attract the strong opposition of adult foster care and assisted living organizations, representing some 5,000 such homes in the state. Hope Network in Grand Rapids, for one, has said the regulations would generate paperwork, create new bureaucracy and "drive up costs unnecessarily with no recognizable benefits for residents."

Pushing for the changes has been the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the union that wants to organize the largely non-union industry. Drawing homes into the union fold would be assisted by rules that make license renewals easier for homes that are unionized than for those that are not.

The draft rules would impose elaborate new administrative, employee wage-and-benefit and staffing requirements, making homes' license renewals dependent upon compliance -- but with an automatic assumption that homes covered by collective bargaining agreements already are in compliance. They thus would be outside state scrutiny.

Both the House and Senate have inquired into this issue. The Senate is farthest along, with five bills emerging this week from the Families and Human Services Committee, chaired by Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood. The bills, whose co-sponsors include Sens. Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, and Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, would bar union preferences from statutes covering foster care and assisted living group homes. Language in each bill says that "a rule promulgated under this act shall not discriminate in favor of or against any provider . . . based on the presence of, or lack of, a collective bargaining agreement with employees."

This is basic collective-bargaining equity, ensuring that the state holds to a neutral stance regarding union organizing.

The position of AFSCME and Department of Human Services has been that no rules are in place and so no legislative action is appropriate. But also true is that once the rules are officially embedded in the state's regulatory framework, amending them -- if possible at all -- would be time consuming and complicated.

The legislation ought to go forward, though its chances of being signed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm likely are doubtful at best. The governor's wisest option would be to head off any collision with lawmakers and the care industry, making sure that any new rules covering adult care contain no preferences for labor and do not impose unnecessary costs and intrusions on the foster homes and their employees. This shouldn't be a political issue. It's about state government's duty to be reasonable, restrained and evenhanded. Slanted, onerous labor relations rules don't qualify.

State needs to increase standards for home energy efficiency -- builder

FLUSHING TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, February 10, 2006

By Elizabeth Shaw

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FLUSHING TWP. - Have you test driven your house lately?

Experts say that's the first step to saving on energy costs.

"What we've got to do is realize our houses are a machine just like a car and you want them to be as high-performing as possible," said architect Douglas Black, whose East Lansing-based Enerficiency specializes in designing - you guessed it - energy-efficient homes and commercial buildings.

He also offers his expertise to Urban Options, a nonprofit group bringing its energy education outreach program to Flushing Township on Saturday.

Black is an advocate for tougher energy-efficiency standards in the state construction code, an issue that's being fought by the Michigan Association of Homebuilders.

"Forty-six other states have higher energy codes for new construction than we have," said Black. "We need to require insulated basement walls, higher insulation values in attic spaces and high efficiency windows. Those three things alone would save new homeowners thousands of dollars over the life of their home."

Rising energy costs eventually will force those changes no matter what, he said, when homeowners find their utility costs higher than their mortgages.

"It's on the tipping point right now. With interest rates as low as they are, people can get a pretty big home for the money, but they're putting two and three furnaces in some of these large houses just to heat them," he said. "But the real problem in older cities like Flint, Saginaw and Detroit are all the low-income families and seniors who are living in old houses paying \$500 to \$600 a month in gas bills."

Green roofs, drainwater heat recovery systems and other high-tech innovations aren't the only ways to cut energy costs. Black recommends simple ideas like setting the water heater under 125 degrees, sealing air leaks and frequent changing of furnace filters.

"Natural gas is a commodity and will continue to go up in cost, not down. We need to address how not to just use state money to pay people's bills in emergencies, but how to help people improve their homes long-term."

QUICK TAKE

Saving energy

- What: How to achieve energy savings
- Details: A free public presentation by Urban Options of East Lansing, a nonprofit environmental education group.
- When: 10 - 11:30 a.m. Saturday
- Where: Flushing Township Hall, 6524 N. Seymour Road.
- For more information: (810) 659-0800 or (810) 639-6161.
- Online: www.urbanoptions.org
www.enerficiency.com

Drugmakers cut off free pills to needy seniors

Firms cite Medicare's prescription drug plan as reason

Sharon Terlep / The Detroit News

Friday, February 10, 2006

Dozens of pharmaceutical companies are cutting back or eliminating programs that deliver free drugs to millions of needy senior citizens.

The drug firms say many of the charity medications are no longer needed now that Medicare's landmark prescription drug plan is in place for more than 41 million elderly and disabled Americans.

But health advocates say some patients -- especially those who rely on expensive brand-name drugs -- are being forced to choose between buying the Medicare benefit and getting free help from drugmakers, while others are losing access to certain medications altogether.

"These drug industry programs have been a lifeline for people who cannot afford prescription drugs," said Deane Beebe, spokeswoman for the New York-based Medicare Rights Center. "It's a major loss."

That's true for Dearborn Heights' Rosemary Post, who will have to pay for some of her 16 medicines. "I don't know where the money is going to come from," she said.

Concern over eroding corporate help comes amid mass confusion surrounding the Medicare plan since its Jan. 1 launch. Dozens of private insurance companies are in charge of administering the nation's first government-sponsored prescription drug program.

Of the approximately 70 pharmaceutical companies operating in the United States, 15 have cut assistance programs altogether for anyone who receives Medicare, whether they are enrolled in a drug plan or not, according to RxAssist, a database that tracks free drug programs.

Another 12 firms won't give free drugs to people enrolled in the federal prescription plan. About two dozen companies are still deciding what to do and others are cutting back to varying degrees. Eight drugmakers have decided to keep their programs wholly intact.

Ed Sagebiel, spokesman for Indianapolis-based Eli Lilly and Co., said the free drug help was not intended to be a permanent fix, but was in place to help out until the federal program kicked in.

The company plans to end its Lilly Answers program, started in 2002, which provides free drugs to about 200,000 Medicare recipients.

"More patients will benefit more with the drug benefit than with our program," Sagebiel said. "They'll have more choices and a better value."

Pfizer Inc., the nation's largest drug company with a major research hub in Ann Arbor, will continue providing free drugs to Medicare recipients who don't have the prescription coverage.

"Pfizer has maintained a commitment to making its medicines available to patients in need," spokesman Rick Chambers said. "We believe that commitment should continue."

The free drug programs, many of which have been in place more than a decade, provide access to more than 2,500 medications. They are open to the estimated 29 million Americans whose incomes are above the national poverty line -- \$9,800 for a single person or \$20,000 for a family of four -- but less than double those levels.

As the companies cut back, people earning between \$14,000 and \$19,000 a year are getting slammed the hardest. They earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid, the federal government health program for the poor, but too little to afford private coverage.

They often find themselves struggling to cover co-pays and deductibles they might have had help with had they made less money.

Patients face a number of difficult scenarios.

In some cases, a patient may be doing well relying on free help directly from drug companies, but now some of those drugs will no longer be free. The patient must turn to Medicare, which charges co-pays and deductibles and may not cover some medications.

A patient also could find a Medicare plan they can afford, only to discover that a specific, and often costly, drug won't be covered. Since that patient has Medicare coverage, many companies won't provide the drugs for free. So the patient will either have to pay for the drug or switch to a less desirable Medicare plan.

Post is caught in the quandary.

For 15 years, the 70-year-old has received her regimen of 16 medications from about eight drug companies. Last month, she began receiving letters from some informing her that she would no longer get the drugs for free.

To keep getting her medicine, Post, whose income is \$1,315 a month from Social Security, signed up for a Medicare plan offered by Humana Inc. The plan covered most, but not all, of the drugs she needs.

Post needs so much medication that she qualifies for a type of catastrophic coverage that will pay 100 percent of her drug costs, but that doesn't kick in until after she has spent \$3,600 out of pocket.

"I'm trying to decide if I'm going to have to eliminate my food to buy drugs," said Post, who takes drugs for asthma, high blood pressure, a stomach condition and depression.

Medicare officials have said safeguards are in place to make sure patients have access to drugs they need even if they're not on the list of drugs typically covered by a plan. Many of the drug companies will continue their programs for the next few months to help patients sort out their coverage.

Most companies will still provide free drugs to the poor and uninsured who are younger than 65 or not disabled and do not qualify for Medicare.

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Published February 10, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Sen. Tom. M.George: State must promote healthy behaviors

The rapidly increasing cost of health care is making Michigan's businesses less competitive, unbalancing our state budget and hindering our schools, universities and local governments. And while Michigan residents are more likely to have health insurance than those in other states, it has not made us healthier. In fact, Michiganians are less healthy and more likely to die prematurely compared to residents of other states.

A quick comparison to Colorado illustrates our problem.

In 2005, Colorado residents had a 46 percent higher rate of being uninsured than Michigan residents and Michigan spent 67 percent more on public health per capita than Colorado, yet the age-adjusted risk of dying from cardiovascular disease in Michigan is 31 percent higher than in Colorado. This amounts to 8,500 more deaths in Michigan per year.

If this discrepancy existed for AIDS, breast cancer or prostate cancer, which tend to strike certain demographic groups, it would be viewed as a public health crisis, but perhaps because it afflicts us all, it has not seemed newsworthy.

How is it that despite billions of dollars spent on health care, Michigan residents end up less healthy than other Americans? It is because we have made ourselves unhealthy. We are less active and smoke more than other Americans. Continuing the comparison with Colorado, Michiganians smoke 15 percent more and exercise 15 percent less than Coloradoans. Consequently, our rate of obesity is 47 percent higher. We have become one of the world's leaders for death from cardiovascular disease and no amount of treatment can undo the damage done to our bodies by years of smoking and inactivity.

The Granholm administration's efforts to address Michigan's public health crisis have been ineffective. In her first three budgets, the governor's top priority was to spend our way to health by taking money from universities, public safety and local governments to buy more Medicaid services. Despite the billions of dollars already spent on Medicaid, and a 40 percent increase in its general fund allotment, that population remains among the least healthy.

Michigan needs comprehensive state policy changes that will encourage healthy behavior. These range from a physical education requirement in elementary schools, to incentives for businesses that provide wellness programs for their employees. Reform is needed to allow insurance companies to reward healthy behavior when underwriting policies.

Innovations are needed within the state's Medicaid program to provide pocketbook incentives for Medicaid recipients who smoke less and exercise more. State contracting and health insurance for state employees (including legislators) should likewise be crafted to encourage healthy behaviors.

We cannot afford to wait - further delay is just a prescription for disaster.

State Sen. Tom. M.George is a Kalamazoo Republican and doctor.

Teen faces sentencing next month

13-year-old pleaded guilty to two felonies in incident with girl, 7, at library

Friday, February 10, 2006
BY TOM TOLEN
News Staff Reporter

A Brighton teen will face sentencing next month after pleading guilty to two felony charges stemming from the Dec. 13, 2005, assault of a 7-year-old girl in the Brighton District Library restroom.

The 13-year-old boy pleaded guilty Feb. 3 to charges of second degree criminal sexual conduct and gross indecency. As part of a plea agreement, two other charges - first degree criminal sexual conduct and accosting for immoral purposes - were dismissed. The case would have gone to trial Feb. 15 had the plea not been accepted.

The Feb. 3 hearing was in Livingston County Juvenile Court before court referee Kathleen Oemke. Neither the boy's parents nor his attorney, Mitch Perrault, would comment on the agreement, and Prosecutor David Morse was unavailable for comment.

"I think people will be happy this is resolved," Brighton District Library Director Charlene Huget said.

Since the incident, four cameras have been installed in the parking lot and four inside the building, at Library Drive and Orndorf Drive in the city of Brighton. "They really are a deterrent to crime," said Huget, emphasizing no attempt was made to hide the cameras.

Three of the video cameras are in the youth area and one is inside the entrance to the library, which gives it a view of the entrance to the men's rest room. "Our idea was to protect the children so the parents can leave them for a couple of minutes and do their own selection," Huget said.

Huget says their mere presence should act as a deterrent and help prevent future occurrences. "We can access the cameras from every staff computer," she said.

The teen faces sentencing March 6. Morse has said the court has wide discretionary powers in sentencing juveniles. He could be sentenced to the W.J. Maxey Boys Training Center in Green Oak Township (for the most serious juvenile offenders) until he reaches 21. Or he could be placed in a foster home,

sentenced to probation or fined. Until his sentencing, the boy will remain in a Washtenaw County juvenile detention facility.

The youth also is a suspect in another incident involving a girl under the age of 13, which was being investigated by Michigan State Police. That case is on hold according to Detective Sean Furlong. "We're still working with the victim, trying to get a clear picture of what happened," Furlong said.

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Let's combat threats to working families

Guarding against attacks should include protecting the poor, workers

February 10, 2006

Detroit News

When Detroit hosted Super Bowl XL last weekend, it also hosted a record 10,000 homeland security personnel. With private security guards patrolling the streets and Canadian air marshals clearing the skies, the Super Bowl's profile as a terrorist target nearly eclipsed its glory as a great day in football history.

But with all our focus on homeland security, we are paying little heed to the security of working families here at home -- the attack on working Americans' health care, wages and pensions -- in essence, the building blocks of the American dream.

In his State of the Union Address, President Bush took us to new heights of empty rhetoric, conveniently side stepping the tragedy in New Orleans and offering Band-Aid solutions to serious domestic problems, like the nearly 48 million Americans who went without health care last year.

Protect security of workers

Soaring health care costs, attacks on Social Security, corporate irresponsibility with pensions and worker safety, stagnant wages and more, these are the security threats I see.

As health care costs skyrocket across the nation, union workers are better able to hold onto their benefits than their nonunion counterparts. Today, 86 percent of union workers' jobs provide health insurance benefits, compared with 59.5 percent of nonunion workers' jobs. There is such a thing as 100 percent employer-paid health care, and it exists in many Teamster contracts.

Bad-faith corporations that push employees off the company plan to fatten their bottom line are threatening workers' health care benefits. More than one quarter of employees in companies with 500 or more workers do not receive employer-based health coverage. The percentage of workers who do dropped from 69 percent to 60 percent between 2000 and 2003.

America's pension system is teetering on the edge of a breakdown, and the retirement security of tens of thousands of American workers hangs in the balance.

Congress' corporate-friendly tinkering with pension law has invited dozens of companies to shirk their funding responsibilities. Now when companies cry penniless in bankruptcy court, they can walk away with millions of dollars that could have gone to people robbed of their retirement security.

The law even denies workers the right to sue to get that money back. The current tab for unfunded private-sector pensions is \$450 billion.

Pension double standard

There's also no pension crisis in Congress. Corporate-owned politicians decry pension plans as an unaffordable dinosaur, urging workers to just save more of their shrinking cash for retirement. But you won't see the men and women in Congress dumping their pensions in favor of a 401(k). So much for small government.

Against this backdrop of corporate greed and unscrupulous politicians, unions are the best way for working people to achieve economic security. But union workers are also vital to our

national security. Airline, railroad and port workers stand at the frontlines of our nation's security; unionization in these sectors guarantees a stable work force with long-term experience and proper training.

It also guarantees better safety and health for workers on the job. The recent deaths at the Sago Mine and others in West Virginia reminded us of the risks people must take in this country to feed their families.

Nonunion mining risks

But those risks are greatly reduced when workers, not just corporate executives, determine safety standards. It's no coincidence that 17 of the 18 coal miners killed since Jan. 1 worked in nonunion mines. And it's not surprising that Bush has appointed a former mining company executive to head the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

The 10,000 police officers stationed around Detroit on Super Bowl Sunday left hardly a street unguarded. But I doubt they took much notice of the devastation that surrounded them - the 280,000 residents, nearly one-third of Detroit's population, living below the poverty line.

After the horrors of September 11, it makes sense to take every possible precaution to save American lives. That should include the people suffering in our midst.

Labor Voices James P. Hoffa is president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Please e-mail letters to letters@detnews.com.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

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Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in Detroit *Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption*

February 10, 2006

DETROIT – There are more than 4,000 children in Michigan with parental rights terminated who are either waiting for their adoption to be finalized or waiting for a family. Most of these children are among those hardest to place – kids who are older and members of minorities and/or sibling groups. Adoption for older youth in the foster care system is a priority to ensure they do not leave the foster care system without a connection to a supportive adult.

Sixty of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called The Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display from February 11 – March 11, 2006 at the Detroit Public Library – Main Branch, 5201 Woodward Ave., in Detroit.

A special afternoon event honoring the children, photographers and families who participated in this event will be held on Saturday, February 25, 2006 at 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. An adoption information meeting will be held at the library on Wednesday, March 8, 2006 at 6:00-7:45 p.m. The public is invited to attend both events.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a “forever family.” The Michigan Heart Gallery features portraits of Michigan’s waiting children who come from various regions of the state and are representative of different races and ages.

“The Michigan Heart Gallery has been an amazing undertaking,” Kristen Donnay, intake coordinator for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, said. “The portraits of the children are compelling. They draw you in and make you feel like you know the child. Equally as impressive has been the time, energy and compassion that the photographers have brought to the project.”

Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

“Most of the children featured have been waiting for a long time to find a family to call their own,” Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. “While we hope the children featured in The Heart Gallery will find families, the larger goal of The Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children who need families, then they are forgotten. We are thrilled that the public will have a chance to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them.”

-MORE-

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 50 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves. Professional photographer Andre LaRoche volunteered to participate in The Michigan Heart Gallery and photographed 11-year-old Anthony.

"After meeting Anthony and walking around the youth home looking for a location to photograph him, I had to wipe tears from my eyes," LaRoche said. "My son is four years old and I give him and he gives me so much love. Without him, my life would be empty. I cannot easily think of all the boys at this center, with no loving parents, without a home, with their hopes and dreams possibly out of their reach."

For more than two years Anthony has been in the foster care system, waiting for his forever family. Recently, he was matched with a family after his Heart Gallery photograph caught their eye on the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange Web site.

Another piece of The Michigan Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features 14 families who have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

"These wonderful families show others that it is possible to build a family through special needs adoption," Udow said. "Despite the rough times that they might have faced along the way, they prove how much love and care can do for these children."

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Stirring photographs, which reveal the children's spirits and individuality, have helped many of them find loving homes. The Heart Gallery has expanded to dozens of states and cities since 2001. Heart Galleries all over the United States have been featured in *People* magazine, the *New York Times* and on CNN, MSNBC and the Today Show.

For the online version of the gallery or for more information about The Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

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